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SUBJECT: PROPOSALS FOR COLLABORATING WITH THE VATICAN ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

REF: A. A) MECHAM-NOYES EMAIL OF DECEMBER 1, 2009
 1B. B) VATICAN 134
 1C. C) VATICAN 135

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11. (U) Catholics and the organized Catholic Church are present in virtually every country of the world, and the Holy See is second only to the United States in terms of relations with other states. Given this near-universal presence and the Vatican's critical role in interfaith dialogues, Embassy Vatican has liaised closely with the Holy See on inter-religious dialogue. The Holy See has reservations about governmental involvement in the purely theological aspects of interfaith dialogue (ref c), but the Vatican has willingly engaged with the Embassy on concrete interfaith and related initiatives.

12. (U) In 2009, for example, the Embassy:

-- Sponsored a conference in January on the American model of secularism for an audience of Vatican officials, representatives from the 78 resident embassies accredited to the Holy See, the media, and academic institutions. Over 200 people attended, and the discussion led to weeks of positive commentary. (Note: Copies of the conference's proceedings are available. Contact PAO Nathan Bland at: blandjn@state.gov)

-- Gave a grant to a Vatican-sponsored organization to run a week-long seminar in April, for Catholic and Jewish young people from several countries to train them to participate in interfaith dialogues in the future.

-- Sponsored a speaker from the United States in May to discuss how faith-based communities can work together to help fight climate change globally. The speaker was invited to join a Catholic Church-sponsored delegation to the Copenhagen Climate Summit.

-- Funded the publication in the fall of the annual journal on Islamic-Christian relations by the Pontifical Institute for Study of Arabic and Islam (PISAI).

¶3. (SBU) Embassy Vatican is planning additional activities in the months ahead to further advance interfaith dialogue with, and through, the Vatican and Vatican-affiliated organizations:

-- A conference, possibly with co-sponsors, on how governments and faith communities have -- and can continue to -- interact to achieve concrete goals in areas like peace, environmental protection, health care, combating trafficking in persons, and aid to migrants and refugees.

-- An interfaith service project related to Earth Day.

-- A follow-up grant to PISAI for additional inter-religious publications in 2010.

-- Participation by the Ambassador in the Sant'Egidio Community's interfaith gathering in the fall.

¶4. (SBU) The Embassy would appreciate the opportunity to engage Washington officials in its interfaith discussions with the Vatican, as follows:

-- Digital Video Conferences with USG officials working on interfaith issues and Vatican or Vatican-affiliated officials, and Ambassadors to the Holy See, on topics to be confirmed. Embassy proposals are USG's Muslim outreach efforts, and interfaith action to combat Trafficking in Persons.

-- Visits and in-person discussions on promoting interfaith

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dialogue and action on shared priorities between U.S. and Vatican officials, in Rome or Washington.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy Vatican would also welcome the opportunity to partner with other U.S. embassies on interfaith initiatives. Specifically, the Embassy would like to co-sponsor with embassies in other regions:

-- A photo competition for young people between the ages of 12-17 on the topic of interaction and collaboration between people of different faiths; and subsequent exhibits of the winning photos from all participating countries

-- DVC dialogues between students at Pontifical Universities and students at Middle Eastern or other universities on interfaith issues, in the lead-up to the October 2010 Synod (i.e., formal meeting) of Catholic Bishops from the Middle East.

Embassy Vatican PAO will contact PAO's at other embassies with specific proposals on both these initiatives. Embassy Vatican would be open to other suggestions for collaboration with other missions on interfaith issues.

¶6. (SBU) Finally, and in keeping with the QDDR objectives of pursuing "whole of government" solutions and outreach to non-traditional partners, Embassy Vatican would like to join broader interfaith efforts under consideration at the Department. Specifically, Embassy Vatican offers to host and help organize a regional meeting of an interfaith working group (ref A), on a topic to be decided. Possibilities include:

Protecting the Environment (a major priority of the Benedict XVI papacy) or Care and Protection of Refugees (also a Vatican priority and a major issue in Europe). Rome is a central location, mid-point between the United States and some of the countries with which inter-faith discussions are most needed. Moreover, an event here could help tap into and build on the Vatican's already considerable inter-religious dialogues and networks. Finally, U.S. support for an event in Rome would also signal to the Holy See, the base for the world's largest single religion, U.S. seriousness about building bridges between traditional and non-traditional partners to advance policy priorities.

¶7. (U) Ambassador Miguel Diaz will be in Washington the week of January 4, 2010 and is requesting appointments with Department officials to discuss these proposals in greater depth.

DIAZ